



# Solihull Symphony Orchestra



*The Magical Toy Shop*  
*Shirley Methodist Church*  
*19:30 Saturday 4 July 2026*

Programme £1

# Tommaso Nista



Italian conductor Tommaso Nista is known for his passion for storytelling across symphonic, operatic, and contemporary repertoire. He is Music Director of the Solihull Symphony Orchestra, Assistant Conductor and Librarian of the Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra, Chief Conductor of the Junior Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Symphony Orchestra and Associate MD of the Loughborough Orchestra. He is invited regularly by several orchestras around Birmingham.

A proud advocate for innovative programming, education, and inclusivity, Tommaso is also Chief Conductor of the Birmingham Game Music ensemble, an orchestra dedicated to video game soundtracks, for which he often works as an arranger. Under his

direction, the ensemble has presented music from *Final Fantasy*, *The Last of Us*, and *The Legend of Zelda*, amongst others, bringing new audiences to orchestral music.

Tommaso recently graduated with Distinction in Orchestral Conducting from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. His mentors include Kazuki Yamada, Karen Ní Bhroin, Daniele Rosina, Michael Seal, Paul Murphy, and Paul Wingfield. During his studies, he assisted in opera productions including *Cendrillon* (Massenet), *Albert Herring* (Britten), *Hansel und Gretel* (Humperdinck), and *Fête Galante* (Smythe), and received both the Guy Wolfenden Prize for Young Conductors (2024) and the Michael Beech Conducting Award (2025).

Tommaso began his conducting journey in Italy, studying wind band and choir conducting. In 2020, he attended the Italian Opera Academy in Ravenna under Riccardo Muti, which deepened his commitment to the Italian operatic tradition. Tommaso is a Serena Fenwick Programme Artist for 2026, in partnership with British Youth Opera and Garsington Opera Now. He is also active as an Italian language coach and team-building expert with several companies across the UK.

Programme notes - David Evans

Cover - *Le Grande Orchestre* (1948), Raoul Dufy, (1877-1953), Private Collection

# Programme

Rossini / Respighi - La Boutique Fantasque 24'

INTERVAL

Milhaud - Le Boeuf sur le Toit 18'

Stravinsky - The Firebird Suite 26'

## **Conductor**

Tommaso Nista

## **Leader**

Charlotte Beresford

*Please make sure that all telephones, watch alarms and other electronic devices that make noises are switched OFF or to silent. You can make short video recordings and take photographs - but please do not use flash and be careful not to disturb people nearby. And we'd love it if you could share them and tag us on social media!*

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868),  
orchestrated by Ottorino  
Respighi (1879-1936)

## La Boutique Fantasque



Gioachino Rossini was born in Pesaro on the Adriatic coast of Italy on 29 February, which gave him a birthday only once every four years and a lifelong excuse to stay young. He was the most famous opera composer in Europe while still in his twenties, turning out comedies like *The Barber of Seville* at a speed that scandalised more diligent composers. Then, after *William Tell* in 1829, he simply stopped writing operas at the age of only 37 and gave his remaining decades over to a decadent life in Paris with good food and lavish entertaining. He is possibly the only composer with a

steak named after him. However, to keep his hand in, he turned out a huge number of small piano and vocal pieces which he called, with the self-mockery that ran through everything he did, his *péchés de vieillesse*, his sins of old age. They carry titles to match: Castor Oil, Asthmatic Study, Gherkins, Abortive Polka. They were inoffensive throwaway pieces, and all but forgotten until Respighi got hold of them.

Ottorino Respighi was born in Bologna and trained first as a violinist and violist. As a young man he spent time in St Petersburg, playing viola in an opera orchestra and taking orchestration lessons from Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, the same teacher who shaped the young Stravinsky. Orchestration is essentially the process of taking a simple piece of music, often written originally for the piano, and reworking it for a full orchestra. Respighi became one of the most dazzling orchestrators of the twentieth century, best known for his glittering tone poems, the *Fountains* and *Pines of Rome*. He also had a deep love of ancient music, reviving and reworking pieces from the past. In 1919 he brought a pile of these Rossini trifles to the Russian impresario Sergei Diaghilev, who sat down at the piano and played them through

to his choreographer Léonide Massine. The three of them saw a ballet in it. Massine reworked an old Viennese piece about dancing dolls, while the Fauvist painter André Derain supplied the sets and costumes.



*La Boutique Fantasque*, the magic toyshop, opened at the Alhambra in London on 5 June 1919 where Diaghilev and the Ballet Russe were in enforced exile after the 1917 revolution in Russia. It was an immediate hit.

The story is exactly the sort of thing that should not work and yet somehow it does. A toymaker shows off his mechanical dolls to a shopful of customers, two prim English ladies, an American family and a Russian family. The dolls perform a tarantella and a mazurka, and are

joined by a troupe of Cossacks and a pair of dancing poodles. There are also a pair of can-can dancers, who happen to be in love. One family buys him, the other buys her, and they are boxed up for collection in the morning. That night, when the shop is dark, all the toys come alive, mourn the lovers' parting, and conspire to hide them. The customers come back to find empty boxes, round on the shopkeeper, and are routed by an army of furious toys, the Cossacks seeing them off at bayonet-point. The dolls dance on in triumph.

What you will be hearing today is that parade of dances, lifted more or less intact and presented by Respighi in full orchestral colours. There is the bustling overture, the whirling tarantella, the slinky can-can that everyone recognises the moment it starts, and a slow waltz of real tenderness in the middle, before a galloping finale that does not so much end as fall over the finishing line. Rossini provided the tunes and the wit; Respighi provided the glow, the woodwind detail and the brass that makes a toyshop sound like the best night out in town.

But it is really just a love story about two clockwork dancers, told through the music of a retired genius who refused to take anything seriously.

Darius Milhaud (1892-1974)

## Le Boeuf sur le Toit Op.58

Darius Milhaud was born into a traditional Jewish family in Marseille and grew up in nearby Aix en Provence. One of the young Paris composers known as Les Six, he wrote with enormous fluency and range, leaving over four hundred works behind him, and was among the first to smuggle real jazz into concert music after falling for it in Harlem. Rheumatoid arthritis put him in a wheelchair for much of his life and kept him in near-constant pain, none of

which you would guess from the sunniness of his music. He titled his memoirs *My Happy Life*.

Driven out of France by the Nazis, he settled in California and taught at Mills College, where one student, the jazz pianist Dave Brubeck, thought so much of him that he named his son Darius.

*Le Boeuf sur le Toit* began life as music for a film that was never made. Milhaud wrote it as fifteen minutes to run under any Charlie Chaplin silent comedy, something rapid and cheerful to fill the screen. Then Jean Cocteau got hold of it, told Milhaud the film idea was a



waste, and persuaded him to let it be staged instead. The result was a surrealist farce set in an American speakeasy during Prohibition, peopled by a boxer, a barman, a red-haired woman in men's clothes, and a policeman who has his head sliced off by a ceiling fan, dances with by one of the customers, and is then put back together again before being handed an enormous bill. The performers were circus clowns and acrobats in vast cardboard heads, moving in dreamlike slow motion while the music rattled along beneath them. Raoul Dufy painted the set. One early account called the action 'pleasantly devoid of all meaning,' which seems about right.

The music itself comes from somewhere else entirely. Milhaud had spent the best part of two years in Brazil, having gone out to Rio in 1917 as secretary to the poet and diplomat Paul Claudel. He came home besotted with the place and its music, and this work is the fruit of that. He took Brazilian tangos, maxixes, sambas and a Portuguese fado, and stitched more than twenty of them together, threading a bouncy little refrain of his own between each pair so the whole thing turns like a carousel. Listen for that refrain coming round again and again; it is the one tune in the piece Milhaud actually wrote.



What gives it the faint air of someone who has had one drink too many is the harmony. Milhaud was the great evangelist of polytonality, the trick of playing in two or more keys at once, and here a sunny melody will sit on top of an accompaniment that has wandered off into the wrong key. Nothing ever sounds sour exactly, just gloriously off its hinges. Under the cheek there is real craft: the shape is an old French rondo, the kind Couperin and Rameau wrote, dressed up in carnival colours. There is one last twist. Everyone assumes Milhaud named the piece after the famous Paris bar, Le Boeuf sur le Toit, where Cocteau and his circle drank and jammed through the twenties. It was the

other way round. The bar opened a year or so later and borrowed the title from the music, much to Milhaud's lasting irritation, since people kept congratulating him on naming a ballet after a nightclub he had nothing to do with. The phrase was his all along, lifted from a Brazilian song. The ox on the roof is an image as cheerfully absurd as the piece it named.

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

## The Firebird Suite

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In the spring of 1910 Igor Stravinsky was a twenty-seven-year-old nobody had ever heard of. By the morning after the premiere he was world famous. *The Firebird* was the first ballet Sergei Diaghilev commissioned with an entirely new score for his Ballets Russes, but Stravinsky was not his first choice as composer, nor even his second. Nikolai Tcherepnin began the job and dropped it, so the commission passed to the older, better-established composer, Anatoly Lyadov. A much-repeated story has Lyadov dithering for so long before even getting round to buying any manuscript paper that Diaghilev sacked him. It is a good story but almost certainly embroidered, as there is no real evidence that Lyadov ever accepted the commission at all.

Either way the gamble fell on the young Stravinsky, and on 25 June 1910 at the Paris Opéra it paid off spectacularly.

Stravinsky grew up inside the Russian opera world, as his father was a leading bass at the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg. However he originally trained as a lawyer, while having private lessons in composition from Rimsky-Korsakov, who acted as a mentor and father figure during his formative years. In the space of four years, Stravinsky changed music forever with three ballets for Diaghilev: *The Firebird*, *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*, whose premiere set off a full-scale riot in Paris in 1913. For the rest of his long life he refused to stand still, reinventing himself every decade or two, formal and neoclassical for many years before flirting with atonal music in his seventies. He left Russia for good, lived in Switzerland and France, and ended up a grand old man of American music in Hollywood. He is buried in the Isola di San Michele cemetery in the Venice lagoon, close to Diaghilev.

Michel Fokine assembled the scenario from Russian folk tales. Prince Ivan strays into the enchanted garden of Kashchei, an immortal ogre who keeps princesses captive and turns

visiting knights to stone. Ivan catches the Firebird, a creature of pure flame, and frees her in exchange for a magic feather. When Kashchei's monsters fall on him, the feather summons the bird back; she whirls the whole court into a frenzied dance and then a deep sleep, before giving up the secret of the ogre's death, which is hidden, with proper folk-tale logic, inside an egg. Ivan smashes the egg, Kashchei dies, the spell breaks.

There are in effect two separate worlds in the music. The magical creatures get glittering, slippery, chromatic writing, with harp glissandi and shivering high strings, while the mortals get plain, warm, folk-song tunes. That division came straight from Rimsky-Korsakov, whose ear for orchestral colour permeates the whole score, though there are already glimpses of the Stravinsky the rule-breaker to come. The suite moves from the dark hush of the opening, low in the basses, through the Firebird's flickering dance and the gentle round dance of the princesses, to the famous Infernal Dance of Kashchei, where snarling brass and a pounding, deliberately off-balance rhythm knock the whole orchestra sideways and hint at the savagery to come. Then comes the Berceuse, a lullaby led by solo bassoon over murmuring strings, and the Finale,

where a single horn floats out an old Russian melody like the first light of dawn before the whole orchestra gathers it up into one of the great blazing endings in the repertoire.

Stravinsky stayed fond of the piece but shrewd about its commercial possibilities. He made three concert suites over the years, in 1911, 1919 and 1945, partly to perform the best of the ballet without the staging and partly, as he happily admitted, to keep the royalties coming. The 1919 version is the one that stuck

Whatever came afterwards, and plenty did, it was the Firebird that started it all.





# CONCERT

A Night of Masterpieces

## JRBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



**Tchaikovsky - Symphony 4 mov. 1**  
**Ravel - Piano Concerto for the Left Hand**

**Max Walsh - piano**

**Tommaso Nista - conductor**

**RBC - Bradshaw Hall • Sat 11th July, 18h**

### Non-Playing Members

If you would like to become more involved with the orchestra, there are a variety of tasks and activities that are open to friends of the orchestra as well as to players. We'd love some extra help with refreshments at Tuesday rehearsals, and ticket sales on concert days. In return, we offer complimentary tickets for all our concerts, visits to rehearsals and other benefits! Please email if you'd like more information.

**[info@solihullsymphony.org.uk](mailto:info@solihullsymphony.org.uk)**

### Our Mailing List

If you've enjoyed this concert, why not sign up to our Supporters' Newsletter to make sure you don't miss out on future events? You'll receive advance notice of the full season's programme, and reminders about all our concerts a few weeks in advance.

**[www.solihullsymphony.org.uk/mailling-list](http://www.solihullsymphony.org.uk/mailling-list)**



# Solihull Symphony Orchestra

**Patron: The Mayor of Solihull**



## **First Violins**

Charlotte Beresford

*leader*

Marina Battey

Lis Branson

Vivienne Brown

Sanjana Cherukad

Peter Halldron

Jo Oswald

Sarah Sasse

Will Scott

Anika Vairavaraja

## **Second Violins**

Charlotte McLuskie

John Bayley

Jessica Harris

Rosy Hughes

Sarah Letters

John Maxwell

David Roper

Sue Walker

Susannah Watson

Emma Wild

## **Violas**

Joanna Clarke

Hannah Branson

Leah Broadfield

Mark Emms

Kelvin Farge

Julia Lawley

## **Cellos**

Helen Atherton

Jeremy Dale

Kim Free

Raye Garrett

Louise Robertson

Nicola Walters

## **Double Basses**

David Evans

Alice Norman

Jamie Wall

## **Flutes**

Su Newton Ede

Mary Wright

Chris Kelland

## **Oboes**

Luke Cutler

Fiona Speak

Duncan Spiers

## **Clarinets**

Victoria Rex

Jane Emms

## **Bassoons**

Harry Jones

David Glover

## **Harp**

Reuben West

## **Horns**

Tim Overton

Nicki Daw

Stephen Mayes

Edward Fisher

Emma McLeod

## **Trumpets**

David Hirst

Colin Farlow

Maz Bradbury

## **Trombones**

Ian Rae

David Chubb

Bernard Moses

## **Tuba**

Paul Jackson

## **Timpani**

David Pett

## **Percussion**

Matt Firkins

Juffie Zhu

Emma Taylor

Owen Yarrow

## **Pianoforte**

Fiona Fang



SUPPORTING &  
CHAMPIONING  
VOLUNTARY MUSIC

## About the Orchestra

Solihull Symphony Orchestra is an diverse and friendly group that enjoys taking on the challenge of a varied repertoire with professional leadership and inspiring soloists.

We are always open to new members, especially violin, viola and double bass players. A commitment to attend rehearsals regularly, and a willingness to learn are more important than formal music qualifications. We like to perform in different venues around Solihull, and welcome invitations to play at special events.

Rehearsals are held at Shirley Methodist Church every Tuesday from 19:30 until 21:45 during school term time, with at least four concert performances each year.



## Our Next Concert

**Saturday 21 November**  
**15:30, Shirley Methodist Church**

**Wagner** - Tannhauser Overture  
**Ravel** - Piano Concerto for the Left Hand  
**Mussorgsky** - Pictures at an Exhibition

**Conductor** - Tommaso Nista

**Pianoforte** - Salome Chitaia



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